

National Park Service
2014 Environmental Achievement Awards

Winner

Death Valley National Park Management Team

*International Dark Sky Park Designation
Saving Energy While Protecting Dark in the Park*

Nighttime darkness is among the most important natural resources at Death Valley National Park (DEVA). The dark of night provides a spectacle for visitors, an appropriate habitat for native fauna, and an opportunity for astronomical observations. Staff at DEVA recognize the value and fragility of this resource, and have taken significant measures to protect it. These actions allowed the park to earn the prestigious International Dark Sky Park designation from the International Dark-Sky Association (IDA).

This honor is a testament to the ambition and careful planning of NPS staff to manage light pollution in the park. Instead of seeking this designation for a small portion of the park, staff decided to include all 3.4 million acres of park land. Meeting this high bar required a large-scale fundraising effort to assemble the \$250,000 necessary to replace inefficient lights and poorly designed fixtures with energy efficient lower wattage and lumen lights which are fully shielded from light trespass. After seven years of diligent work, all lighting retrofits were completed in 2013.

In addition to infrastructural upgrades, staff at DEVA created detailed, thoughtful management guidelines, the “Guidance for Outdoor Lighting in Death Valley National Park.” These guidelines ensure that the safety, security and way finding for park visitors and staff is provided with minimal to no impacts on Death Valley’s dark night sky. In addition the park is saving money and reducing its carbon footprint by using only the most energy efficient lights, only in places where and when light is needed. Park staff intend to calculate the amount of energy saved and greenhouse gases reduced by the new equipment and guidelines in the first full year following the complete retrofit (2014).

In addition to their achievements inside the park, the staff involved in DEVA’s designation as an International Dark Sky Park have set an example for parks throughout the services, and through their written management guidelines, provided a template for other parks to following their footsteps.